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AUTHOR Leach, Mark M; Stoltenberg, Cal D.
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between mood and information processing, particularly when reviewing the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, lacks conclusive evidence. This study was designed to investigate the hypothesis that information processing would be greater for mood-topic congruence than non mood-topic congruence. Undergraduate students (N=216) were induced with either a dysphoric, neutral, or elated mood condition and given either a strong or weak counterattitudinal appeal supporting senior comprehensive examinations. Depending on condition, subjects were informed that the examinatiions would be implemented either within 6 months (high personal relevance) or within 10 years (low personal relevance). A 2 x 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance and the Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch-Q individual comparisons method were used for group and cell comparisons. The results showed that dysphoric subjects elicited more favorable attitudes under the strong argument condition than did subjects within the elated condition. Dysphoric subjects therefore engaged in more effortful processing than did elated subjects. Personal relevance appeared to have no significant effect in either affective condition. In the neutral mood condition with high personal relevance, more favorable attitudes toward the message occurred within the strong argument condition than within the weak argument condition. Little significant message scrutiny occurred in the low relevance conditions. Overall results suggest that mood-topic congruence elicits more diligent processing of a counterattitudinal appeal. (Author)

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Affect and Persuasion: Effects on Motivation for Information Processing

Mark M. Leach

Cal D. Stoltenberg

University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK 73019

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Abstract

The relationship between mood and information processing, particularly when reviewing the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, lacks conclusive evidence. This study was designed to investigate the hypothesis that information processing would be greater for mood-topic congruence than non mood-topic congruence. Two hundred sixteen [55% female, 45% male] subjects were induced with either a dysphoric, neutral or elated mood condition and given either a strong or weak counterattitudinal appeal supporting senior comprehensive exams. Depending on condition, subjects were informed that the exams would be implemented either within 6 months [high personal relevance] or within 10 years [low personal relevance]. A 2 x 2 x 2 Analysis of Variance [ANOVA] and the Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch-Q [REGWQ] individual comparisons method were used for group and cell comparisons. The results suggest that dysphoric subjects elicited more favorable attitudes under the strong argument condition than subjects within the elated condition. Dysphoric subjects therefore engaged in more effortful processing than elated subjects. Personal relevance appeared to have no significant effect in either affective condition. In the neutral mood condition with high personal relevance, more favorable attitudes toward the message occurred within the strong argument condition than the weak argument condition. Little significant message scrutiny occurred in the low relevance conditions. Overall results suggest mood-topic congruence elicits more diligent processing of a counterattitudinal appeal.

INTRODUCTION

A void in the literature exists pertaining to the relationship between mood and the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion. Bower (1981) states that affective structures are an integral part of a person's cognitive schema and when activated, become focused on schema-consistent material. Therefore, when a depressive state is induced, for example, activation is spread into associative schemas and depressive-type information is elaborated upon. Therefore, a depressive mood may elicit a more careful and effortful consideration of evidence in support of a mood congruent (negative) advocacy than is elicited when a neutral or elated mood exists. The present study provides an initial examination of the relationship between mood and information processing regarding a negative or counterattitudinal advocacy as conceptualized in the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

METHOD

Subjects

Two hundred sixteen undergraduate students (55% female, 45% male) enrolled in introductory psychology courses were the subjects. All subjects received course credit for their participation in the experiment.

Independent Variables

1. Mood- the Independent Variable (IV) of mood was manipulated by inducing either an elated, neutral, or dysphoric affective state using Velton's (1968) mood induction technique.
2. Argument Quality- the IV of argument quality was manipulated by using either a strong message with cogent supporting arguments or a weak message using specious arguments relating to a proposal to institute mandatory senior comprehensive exams at OU (a counterattitudinal recommendation).
3. Personal Relevance- P.R. was manipulated by conveying to the students that either the comprehensive exams would be implemented in 6 months (thus affecting them-high personal relevance), or 10 years (not affecting them-low personal relevance.

Dependent Variable

An attitude measure based on a 9-point Likert type scale (harmful-beneficial, wise-foolish, good-bad, and favorable-unfavorable) was used, and the 4 sub-scales were summed to obtain an overall attitude measure.

Procedure

Students were first asked to complete the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) in order to screen those who may be dysphoric prior to the experiemnt. They were then informed that they would be participating in 2 studies: the first investigating mood induction procedure and the 2nd involving senior comprehensive exams. Subjects then completed form A of the Depressive Adjective Checklist (DACL), followed by Velton's (1968) mood induction technique. Form B of the DACL was then administered, and students were told that experiemnt 1 was now complete. An introduction to the 2nd experiment was then given, followed by a short description of the source, a personal relevance statement, and the message. Students were then instructed to complete the various dependent variable measures and form C. They were debriefed and thanked.

Predictions

1. When the depressive mood state was induced, dilligent processing of the message was expected. Thus, when the message consisted of strong supportive arguments, favorable attitudes were expected. When the message consisted of weak supportive arguments, less favorable attitudes were expected. No effect for personal relevance was anticipated.
2. When the elated mood state was induced, little careful processing of the message was expected. Thus, no differences in resulting attitudes were expected across argument quality or personal relevance conditions.
3. When the neutral mood was induced, differential effects for personal relevance and argument quality were expected. For conditions of high personal relevance, greater message scrutiny was expected with favorable attitudes resulting from strong arguments and less favorable attitudes in response to weak arguments. For conditions

of low personal relevance, little message scrutiny was expected; thus no differences in resulting attitudes regardless of message quality.

RESULTS/DISCUSSSION

Analysis of data was completed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Ryan-Einot-Gabriel-Welsch-Q (REGWQ) individual comparisons metnods.

The mood induction procedure showed significant results (F = 49.17, $p < .0001$), thereby verifying that the mood inductions were effective. Mood was also maintained throughout the length of the experiment (F = 8.63, $p < .0003$); for the posttest measures.

Overall ANOVA's conducted on the attitude measure to test the argument quality manipulation also yielded significant results. The elated mood group (F = 4.11, $p < .009$), the neutral mood group (F = 6.04, $p < .001$), and the depressed mood group yielded significant difference results (F = 5.91, $p < .0012$) on the attitude measure between strong and weak argument conditions indicating that the manipulation was successful.

Results between cells among mood groups were largely consistent with the predictions. Within tne depressive condition, more favorable attitudes were elicited when strong arguments were used. As predicted, subjects hearing weak arguments indicated less favorable attitudes. Personal relevance had no significant effect on attitude measures as predicted.

Within the elated mood condition, no significant differences in attitude occurred among cells, thus suggesting that little dilligent processing of the message. Again, personal relevance had little effect, nor did arguemnt quality.

As expected, differential effects occurred within the neutral mood condition. Subjects attitudes were influenced by message quality under conditions of high personal relevance. Thus, strong arguments resulted in more favorable attitudes than weak arguments. For the low personal relevance conditions, little message scrutiny apparently occurred. Thus, there were no differences in attitudes resulting from exposure to strong or weak arguments.

Overall results support the mood/topic congruence hypothesis: Students appear to process a message better if message is congruent with the respective affective state.

REFERENCES

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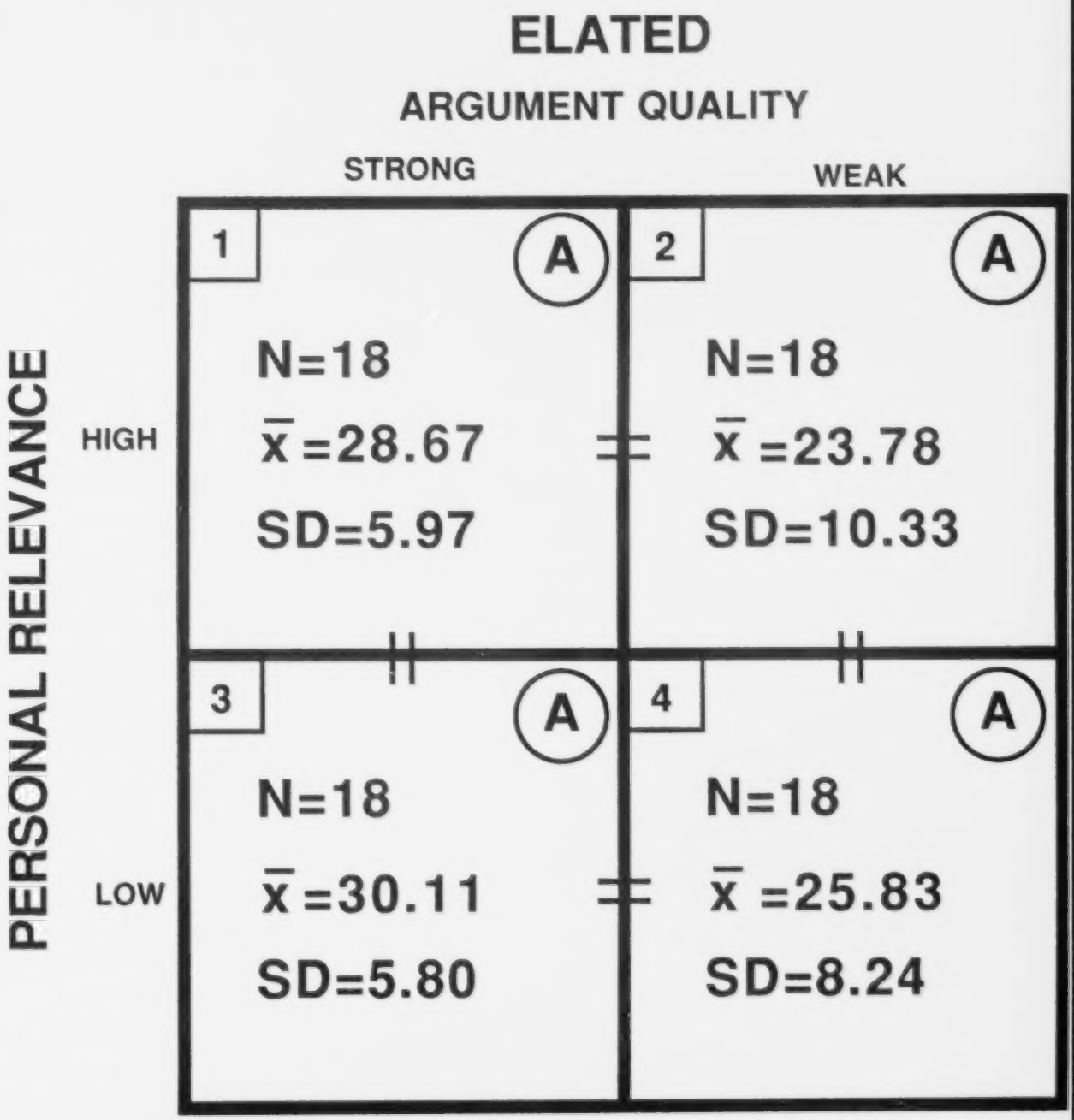
Petty, R.E., & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). Communication & Persuassion: Central & Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change. New York: Springer-Verlag.

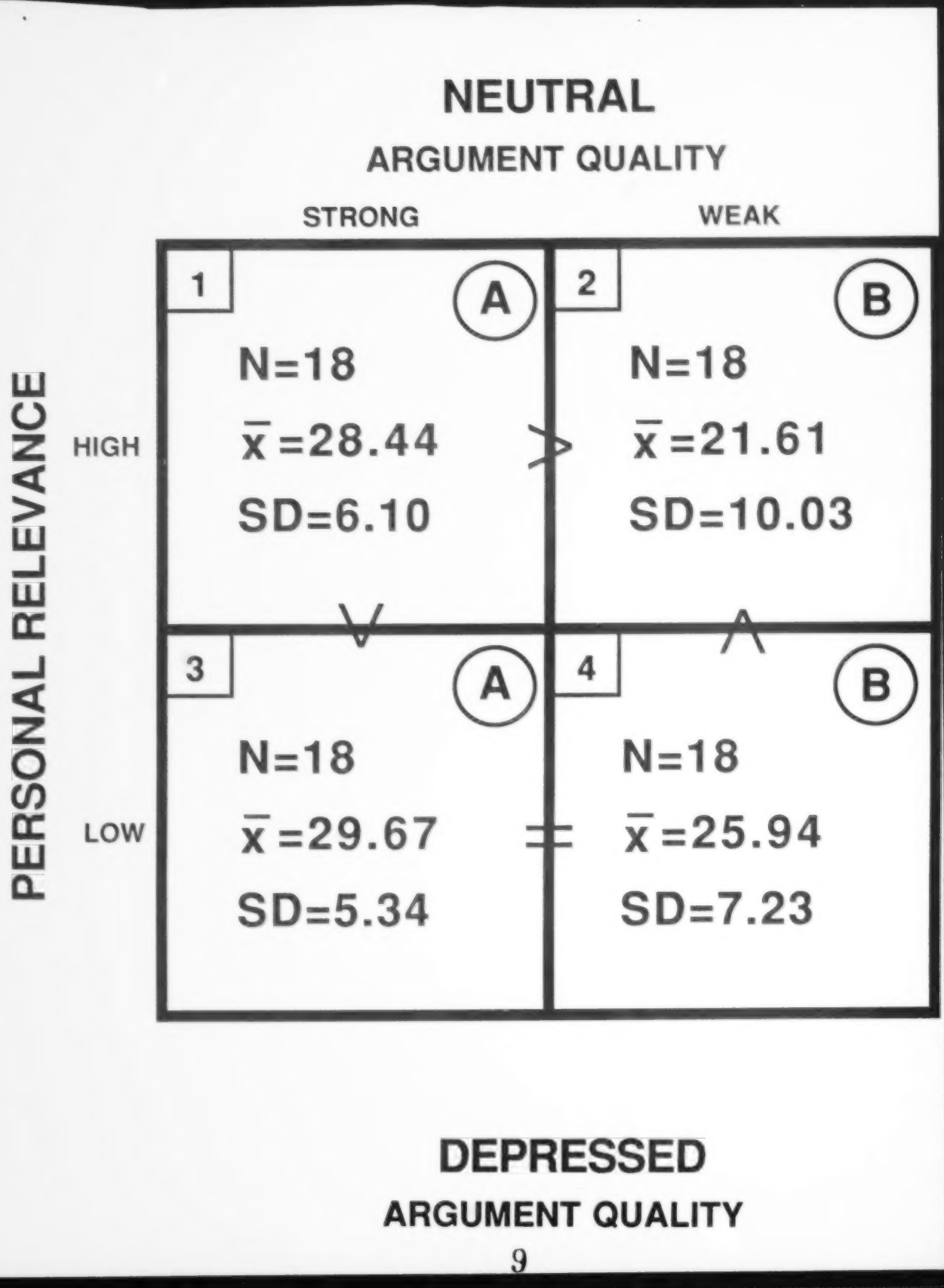
Velton, E. (1968). A laboratory task for induction of mood states. Behavior Research & Therapy, 6, 473-482.

(>, =) indicate prediction

(A,B) represent actual results, with same letters signifying no difference between cells

Results between cells among mood groups were largely consistent with the predictions.

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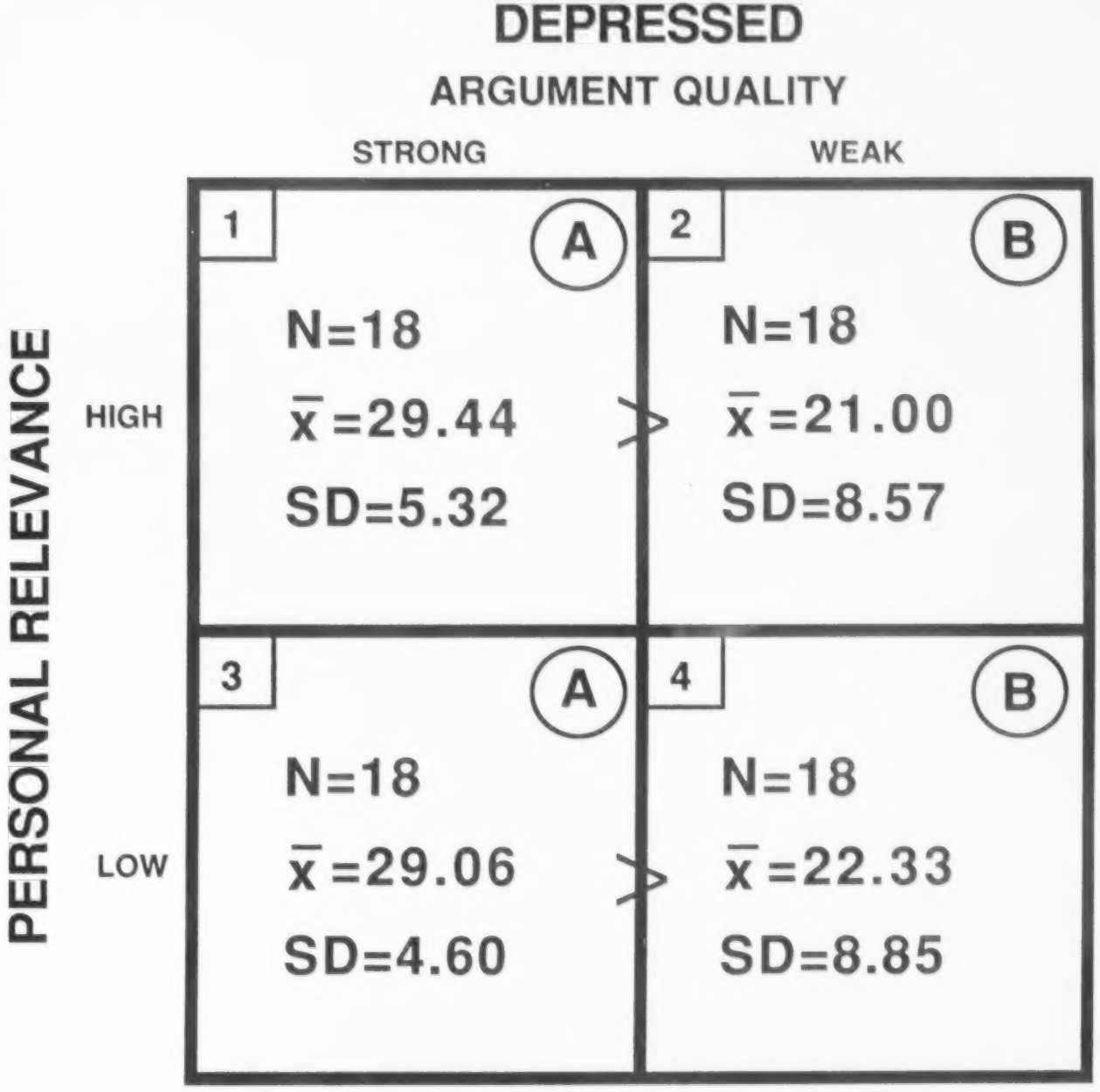
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